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here, I could be by their side, and Mont Blanc a morning's imagination only."

The Diary is very brief, terminating with his observations upon Cambridge, and before he had visited the North of England, Edinburgh, Abbotsford, Glasgow, and the Lowlands of Scotland. He returned home in September.

This diary, the journal, and the letters, constituting as much of self-description as Mr. Choate has left us, possess unquestionably an interest and a value beyond what could be claimed for any biography. There was in him that involution of characteristics, if we may so speak, which makes exact, methodical description quite impossible. The author of the Memoir has given, upon the whole, a just impression of him; and that is a success. His work will serve to perpetuate the memory of the eloquence, learning, and patriotism, the wit and the culture, which secured for Mr. Choate the honor and admiration of his contemporaries. But the best of biographies cannot give us back the charm of his daily life among us. That is for memory alone.

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ART. X. — 1. "*Christopher North.*" *A Memoir of John Wilson, late Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh.* Compiled from Family Papers and other Sources, by his Daughter, MRS. GORDON. Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas. 1862. 2 vols. Small 8vo. pp. xii. and 335, 399.

2. *The Works of PROFESSOR WILSON, of the University of Edinburgh.* Edited by his Son-in-Law, PROFESSOR FERRIER. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons. 1855–58. 12 vols. Small 8vo.

It has often been remarked, that the life of a man of letters affords little variety of incident to a biographer; but this remark scarcely holds good with regard to Professor Wilson. Born to the inheritance of an ample fortune, which was lost through the misconduct or the incompetency of another, he

was compelled at the age of thirty to exchange a life of elegant leisure for one of untiring toil and ceaseless activity of mind. A poet and an essayist, a writer of fiction and a Professor in a Scotch University, his career was for many years identified with the literary history of Edinburgh. Yet it must be conceded even by the most friendly critic, that Mrs. Gordon has not made much of a story which, in the hands of a more practised writer, would have been replete with interest. The most that can be said in favor of her *Memoir* is, that it is not quite so ill-arranged as the Rev. Mr. Southey's *Life* of his father, nor quite so heavy as Dr. Christopher Wordsworth's *Life* of his brother. Wilson's daughter and biographer had a sufficient collection of materials; but she has not displayed much judgment in selecting and arranging them; she has kept back, through ignorance or a fear of "unfilial disrespect," much which is important for a right estimate of her father's character, and she has overloaded her narrative with frequent extracts from writings which are already familiar to every admirer of his genius. Her own style is feeble, vapid, and diffuse; her narrative is often clumsy, obscure, and in one remarkable instance even unintelligible; and her selections from her father's correspondence show that, in spite of the brilliancy of his essays and other papers in Blackwood's *Magazine*, he had little skill as a letter-writer. Moreover, the whole *Memoir* is characterized by that inclination to place every action of its subject in the most favorable light, which is generally exhibited by children when writing the lives of their parents, but which always leads one to distrust the accuracy of a portrait thus painted. It ought, perhaps, to be added, that Mrs. Gordon did not undertake to write the life of her father until the task had been declined by several other persons, and that a daughter could scarcely be expected to be free from partiality.

Of the edition of Professor Wilson's Works published under the careful supervision of his son-in-law, Professor Ferrier, we can speak with somewhat warmer praise. It is by no means complete, though it fills twelve closely printed volumes; but it comprises nearly everything of permanent interest and value from Wilson's pen which is not hopelessly lost

in the early volumes of Blackwood's Magazine, and it is occasionally illustrated by explanatory notes. These notes are brief and well written, and the only complaint that we have to make in regard to them is, that they are not more numerous. With the lapse of time many of the local and personal allusions which enter so largely into Wilson's writings will become more and more obscure, and, if they are read by another generation, the want of further editorial illustration will be severely felt. The first four volumes of this edition contain the celebrated series of dialogues published in Blackwood's Magazine under the title of "*Noctes Ambrosianæ*," omitting the papers, thirty in number, which the editor thinks were not written by Wilson; the next four volumes comprise a selection from his critical and miscellaneous essays; the ninth and tenth volumes are devoted to the "*Recreations of Christopher North*"; the next volume includes most of his contributions to fictitious literature; and the last volume gathers up all of his poetical works which are deemed worthy of preservation. Of the general character of these various writings we shall have occasion to speak in another part of this article.

The father of John Wilson was a wealthy gauze-manufacturer in Paisley, one of the principal manufacturing towns in Scotland; and his mother was a woman of much personal beauty, of a haughty spirit, and an indomitable will. John was their oldest son, and was born on the 18th of May, 1785, inheriting from his father, who died while he was yet a child, a fortune of fifty thousand pounds sterling, and from his mother the energy and self-reliance which enabled him to meet with undaunted courage the heavy pecuniary reverses of later years. As a child, he does not appear to have been in any way remarkable, unless we are to credit the story that he ran away to fish in the neighboring river when he was only three years old, and actually returned with a trout as the evidence of his infantine skill. When he was old enough to attend school, he was placed under the care of a male teacher in Paisley, and after a year or two he was sent to the parish of Mearns, so affectionately described in the "*Recreations*," where he had for his instructor the parish minister. At the

age of twelve he entered the University of Glasgow; and he continued to attend the lectures in this venerable institution until 1803. While he resided at Glasgow he formed an ardent but secret attachment for a young lady of the neighborhood, who appears to have been a person of much beauty and worth of character, yet who unfortunately did not possess the wealth or the social position which his mother would have deemed important. This early attachment exercised a very great influence over his life, both at Glasgow and afterward at Oxford; but the fear of his mother's displeasure finally led him to terminate the engagement, after a mental struggle which lasted almost to the close of his college course, and often drove him to the verge of insanity.

In June, 1803, he was entered as a gentleman-commoner at Magdalen College, Oxford; and, four years afterward, he was graduated with distinction, though we are inclined to think that he had not been a very diligent student. His unfortunate love affair had absorbed much of his thought; and it is certain that, if he did not indulge in the grosser forms of dissipation, he was engaged in some very questionable adventures. Some allowance, however, ought to be made on account of the severity of the inward struggle between love and filial affection, to which we must trace his use of laudanum to revive his spirits, as well as his foolish talk about suicide, and also his plan of joining Mungo Park's second expedition to Africa. Nevertheless, he proved himself to be a good Greek scholar, and he was the first person on whom the Newdigate Prize was ever conferred, — the subject of his poem being "Sculpture, Architecture, and Painting." The production was one of considerable merit, and was printed for the first time in Professor Ferrier's edition of Wilson's Works.

Immediately on leaving Oxford, he took up his residence on the shore of Lake Windermere, where he had recently purchased an estate called Elleray, not far from the residences of Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge. Here he continued to reside as a bachelor until 1811, spending his time in social engagements, in occasional literary occupations, and in those out-of-door sports and exercises for which he always had so strong a taste, and to which his ample fortune enabled him

freely to devote himself. The recollection of his early love had become dim by absence and the lapse of a few years, and he soon determined that it was not good for him to live alone. On the 11th of May, 1811, he married Jane Penny, the daughter of a Liverpool merchant, who had spent the previous season on the shore of Windermere, not far from Wilson's cottage. This lady was of a slight figure and a delicate appearance, presenting a strong contrast to the stalwart form of her husband. Of their domestic life we do not learn much from Mrs. Gordon's Memoir, and when Wilson was a candidate for the Professorship of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, it was frequently asserted by his opponents that he was neither a good husband nor a good father; but this charge seems to have been utterly without foundation, and to have been inspired only by partisan animosity. There is evidence, in his letters to his wife, that he regarded her with a deep and tender affection, and that she was a faithful and devoted wife, ever ready to humor his whims; and he always speaks of her to others with warm affection. She was not, indeed, a person of much intellectual culture, nor quite in sympathy with purely literary pursuits; but she had a hearty admiration of her husband's genius, and readily accepted all his opinions. The four years succeeding his marriage were passed chiefly at Elleray, in the continued enjoyment of all the pleasures of country life, and in the preparation for the press of a volume of poems, — the first fruits of his literary labors. But this period of ease and comparative idleness was at length brought to a sudden close by pecuniary reverses, which stripped him of nearly all his fortune. After his father's death, the property which he inherited had been placed in the care of an uncle, who, according to Mrs. Gordon's account, proved to be dishonest, and squandered the whole, leaving his nephew little better than a beggar. Wilson met this unexpected disaster with manly courage, and at once determined to repair his losses, so far as it might be practicable, by his own exertions as a writer and a member of the bar.

In the same year, indeed, in which he was married, he had contemplated joining the Scottish bar, and, with that view,

had become a member of the Speculative Society in Edinburgh; but it does not appear that he gave himself seriously to the study of the law until he felt the pressure of necessity laid upon him by the reverses of 1815. A few months after his marriage, he had also published his first volume, "The Isle of Palms, and other Poems"; but the book did not meet with a very favorable reception from the public, though it was kindly reviewed by Jeffrey, and writing poetry did not, therefore, promise to be a very lucrative employment. Now, however, in the stress of adverse fortune, his mind was again directed to his legal studies, and to the literary pursuits which were hereafter to become his chief occupation. He speedily removed to Edinburgh, and in the same year was admitted to the bar. As a lawyer, he never acquired even the slightest reputation, and he soon left a profession for which he was wholly unfitted from his want of legal knowledge and his aversion to the technicalities of the law. Literature, therefore, remained his only resource; and in March, 1816, he published his second volume, "The City of the Plague, and other Poems," which was received with much greater favor than its predecessor, and added materially to his reputation. The longest poem in the volume is, indeed, the best of his metrical productions, and contains some admirable passages, though it is far inferior to his prose works. Strangely enough, his poetry, which was often tender and pathetic, was generally weak, and one seldom recognizes the hand which wrote the "Noctes" and the "Recreations." While this volume was in preparation, Wilson and his wife started on a pedestrian tour through the Western Highlands, and actually accomplished a walk of three hundred and fifty miles, travelling sometimes at the rate of twenty-five miles a day. In this excursion, the poet bore the greater part of their apparel in a pack, while his wife carried the lighter articles in her hand. On one occasion, says Mrs. Gordon, in her Memoir, "the travellers had been overtaken by a mist falling suddenly over them when in Rannoch. They missed the beaten track of road, and, getting among dreary moors, were long before they discovered footing that could lead them to a habitation. My father made his wife sit down among the moss, and, taking off

his coat, wrapped her in it, saying he would try and find the road, assuring her, at the same time, that he would not go beyond the reach of her voice. They could not see a foot before them, so dense and heavy was the dreary mist that lay all around. Kissing his wife, and telling her not to fear, he sprang up from where she sat, and bounded off. Not many seconds of time elapsed ere he called her to come to him, the sound guiding her to where he stood. He was upon the road; his foot had suddenly gained the right path, for light there was none. He told her he had never felt so grateful for anything in his life as for that unexpected discovery of the beaten track."

In the year following the appearance of "The City of the Plague," an event occurred, of apparently slight importance in itself, but which was to exercise a powerful influence over his future career. This was the publication, in April, 1817, of the first number of Blackwood's Magazine, or "The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine," as the work was originally called. To this journal Wilson was from the first a frequent contributor, and he has commonly been regarded as its editor; but it is now known that Mr. Blackwood, the publisher of the Magazine, was the sole responsible editor after the withdrawal of Mr. James Cleghorn and Mr. Thomas Pringle, who were the first editors, and whose connection with the work terminated with the sixth number. Wilson's opinions, however, had great weight with Blackwood, and he sometimes procured the rejection of articles which that gentleman was inclined to insert, though he could not always prevent the rejection of his own articles. "Of Blackwood's Magazine I am not the editor," he wrote in a private letter to a friend in 1828, "although, I believe, I very generally get both the credit and discredit of being Christopher North. I am one of the chief writers, perhaps the chief, and have all along been so, but never received one shilling from the proprietor, except for my own compositions. Being generally on the spot, I am always willing to give him my advice, and to supply such articles as may be most wanted when I have leisure to do so. But I hold myself answerable to the public only for my own articles, although I have never chosen to say, nor shall I ever, that I am not edi-



tor, as that might appear to be shying responsibility, or disclaiming my real share in the work." Some idea of the extent of his contributions may be formed from the fact that he furnished in one year, 1830, thirty articles, or more than six hundred printed pages. No complete list of his contributions has been preserved; but between January, 1826, and August, 1852, he contributed nearly three hundred articles, many of them exceeding forty or fifty printed pages in length. From its very commencement the Magazine was characterized by a virulence of partisanship and a coarseness of personal invective, which contributed much to its success, but which greatly debased the public taste, and for which Wilson and his friend Lockhart were in large measure responsible. In the famous "Chaldee Manuscript" Wilson was introduced under the designation of "the beautiful Leopard from the valley of the palm-trees, whose going forth was comely as the greyhound," and Lockhart under that of "the Scorpion which delighteth to sting the faces of men"; and there was certainly much in their appearance and character to warrant this representation.

The fierceness with which the writers for the new Magazine assailed their political opponents provoked many severe rejoinders, one of the most celebrated of which was an anonymous pamphlet, entitled "Hypocrisy unveiled, and Calumny detected, in a Review of Blackwood's Magazine," and said to have been written by a well-known Scottish lawyer, in answer to a very outrageous attack on Professor Playfair by Mr. Lockhart. In this pamphlet both Wilson and Lockhart were handled with remorseless severity, and they keenly felt the attacks of the writer. Immediately on the appearance of the pamphlet they wrote separate notes "To the Author of Hypocrisy Unveiled," to demand satisfaction. Wilson's note was the longer of the two, and ended with a request for the name and address of his unknown enemy, "that I may send a friend to you to deliver my opinion of your character, and to settle time and place for a meeting, at which I may exact satisfaction from you for the public insults you have offered to me." Lockhart's note was very curt, but there could be no doubt as to its meaning. "Sir, — I have no wish to apply epithets of insult to you till I know who you are. If you suppose your-

self to have any claim to the character of a gentleman, you will take care that I be not long without this knowledge.” The answer of the unknown writer was very adroitly worded: it is perhaps needless to say that he declined to give the desired information. This reply closed the correspondence; but it was long before Wilson’s indignation cooled, and the affair ceased to rankle in his breast. Not among the least disagreeable of the results produced by Lockhart’s article was the rupturing of the friendly relations which had previously existed between Wilson and Jeffrey. The former, indeed, had a few months before written an article on Lord Byron for the *Edinburgh Review*; and in transmitting to him the customary remuneration for it, Jeffrey took occasion to express very frankly his opinion of the recent attack on Mr. Playfair, and to pronounce the various allegations brought by the writers for *Blackwood’s Magazine* against the *Review* to be utterly unfounded. “You are said,” he writes, “to be a principal writer in, and a great director and active supporter of, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. In the last number of that work there is an attack upon my excellent friend, Mr. Playfair, in my judgment so unhand-some and uncandid, that I really cannot consent either to ask or accept of favors from any one who is aiding or assisting in such a publication.” To this strong expression of his feelings he added: “I have not the least idea that you had any concern in the composition of that particular paper, and perhaps I have been misinformed as to the nature and extent of your connection with the work in general. But if it be as I supposed, and if you still profess to take the same interest in that Magazine, I do not see that we can possibly co-operate in any other publication.” Wilson’s reply to this letter does not appear to have been preserved: it is not in Lord Cockburn’s *Life of Jeffrey*, and Mrs. Gordon can only conjecture what it may have been.

In the summer of 1820 a new field of labor was opened to Wilson by the death of Dr. Thomas Brown, at that time Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. Several candidates were named to fill the vacancy; but only two were prominent,—Sir William Hamilton and John Wilson,—each of whom was supported mainly on political grounds, the

first receiving the almost undivided support of the Whigs, while the latter was backed by the whole weight of the vast influence which the government at that time possessed in Scotland. The contest was conducted with great bitterness; and, in order to meet the attack of his opponents, Wilson was obliged not only to procure testimonials as to his intellectual capacity, but even to prove that he was a person of good moral character. Among the individuals to whom he made application for the latter purpose was Mrs. Grant of Laggan. This lady, after stating that she had known much of Wilson from his very childhood, and had always understood him "to be a person of amiable and generous feelings and upright intentions," added that she had also believed Mrs. Wilson "to be the tranquil and happy wife of a fond and faithful husband, domestic in his habits, devoted to his children, and peculiarly beloved by his brothers and sisters and his respectable and venerated parent." These indorsements seem to have satisfied the wise men who composed the Town Council, and, totally ignoring the pre-eminent qualifications of Sir William Hamilton, they elected Wilson to the vacant Professorship by a vote of twenty-one to nine.

As the election did not take place until July, and he was to begin the discharge of his new duties in November, he was obliged to set about the task of preparing his lectures with even more than his wonted diligence. Among the subjects of which he proposed to treat were the moral systems of ancient Greece, the physical nature of man, his intellectual powers, his moral nature and affections, his relations to God and to his fellow-men, the virtues and vices, and the will. His first lecture was crowned with brilliant success, though the opposition to his appointment had not yet died out. "There was," says one who was present at its delivery, "a furious bitterness of feeling against him among the classes of which probably most of his pupils would consist, and, although I had no prospect of being among them, I went to his first lecture, prepared to join in a cabal which I understood was formed to put him down. The lecture-room was crowded to the ceiling. Such a collection of hard-browed, scowling Scotsmen, muttering over their knobsticks,

I never saw." Undismayed by these hostile signs, Wilson read his lecture in a loud, clear voice, and soon the tokens of disapprobation gave place to shouts of applause. The rest of the course, which consisted of more than one hundred daily lectures, was scarcely less successful. These lectures have not been printed; but we suppose it will be generally conceded that Wilson failed as a teacher of moral philosophy properly so called, although his lectures were brilliant and popular productions, and he always secured the esteem and affection of his pupils.

Two years after his appointment to the chair of Moral Philosophy he published his first and best-known work of fiction, the "*Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life*," a collection of short tales designed to portray the ordinary life of the Scotch peasants. Many of these sketches are marked by great tenderness and pathos, though they are deficient in naturalness. The incidents separately considered are not improbable, but the characters are almost without exception purely ideal creations, and such as could seldom or never have been found in the circumstances in which they are placed. This work was followed in 1823 by another, of higher pretensions, but exhibiting the same general characteristics, "*The Trials of Margaret Lyndsay*"; and in the summer of 1825 he published a third work in the same department of literature, but of inferior ability to its predecessors, under the title of "*The Foresters*." In the autumn of the same year, in connection with Mr. Lockhart, he brought out, under the fanciful title of "*Janus*," a collection of miscellaneous essays, poems, and tales, designed as the first of a series of annual volumes to be published under the same title. The work was a thick duodecimo, and its contents, which consisted of original papers and translations, were furnished almost entirely by Wilson and Lockhart, in nearly equal proportions. Many of the papers were of great merit; but the work did not meet with a sufficient sale to justify its continuance, and the second volume did not appear. After the failure of this undertaking Blackwood's Magazine was almost the only channel through which Wilson's productions were given to the public, though he occasionally contributed to other works.

Meanwhile much dissatisfaction had been excited in Edinburgh by his failure to lecture on Political Economy, which study he was required to teach as a part of the duties of his professorship ; and early in 1825 application was made to the British government for authority to establish a separate chair of Political Economy. Wilson stoutly resisted the institution of the new professorship, on the ground that it would be an interference with his vested rights ; and he had sufficient influence with the Ministry to prevent the proposed plan from being adopted. But in order to silence his opponents, he was compelled to prepare a course of fifty lectures on this subject, which he delivered alternately with his course on Moral Philosophy. Of the merits of these lectures Mrs. Gordon says nothing, and it is probable, therefore, that they did not produce a very strong impression on any of his pupils, several of whom have communicated to her their personal recollections of him. They are now as utterly forgotten as his more popular course.

During the great struggle on the Reform Bill, he fully shared in the excitement of that memorable period, and not only wrote in the Magazine in opposition to Parliamentary Reform, but also came forward as a public speaker. At a meeting held in Edinburgh, he spoke at considerable length on the subject, and repeated with unwonted eloquence the familiar commonplaces by which the Tory orators and writers endeavored to uphold the existing system. In the following summer he spent several weeks in a cruise with the experimental squadron, visiting several of the principal places in the South of England, and in Ireland. Of this cruise he gave a minute account in a series of letters to his wife, which are printed at length by his daughter ; but however interesting to his family these letters may have been at the time, they are scarcely worthy of publication.

Not long after his return from this pleasure trip, we find him engaged in an endeavor to effect a reconciliation between Blackwood and the Ettrick Shepherd, who had been for some time estranged from each other. The letters which he addressed to the latter on this occasion have been preserved, and are not only among the best-written of his epistolary productions, but are also remarkable for their good sense. " My dear

Shepherd," he writes in his first letter, "from the first blush of the business I disliked your quarrel with the Blackwoods, and often wished to be instrumental in putting an end to it, but I saw no opening, and did not wish to be needlessly obtrusive. Hearing that you would rather it was made up, and not doubting that Mr. Blackwood would meet you for that purpose in an amicable spirit, I volunteer my services — if you and he choose to accept of them — as mediator." He then proposes as the basis of the settlement, "that all mere differences on this, and that, and every subject, and that all asperities of sentiment or language on either side, be at once forgotten, and never once alluded to, — so that there shall be asked no explanation nor apology, but each of you continue to think yourself in the right, without taking the trouble to say so." But in one particular he thought that Hogg ought to make some acknowledgment. In Hogg's Autobiography an allusion to some pecuniary transaction with Blackwood was inserted, on which a direct charge of dishonesty had been based, and, as Wilson justly remarked, Mr. Blackwood could never make up a quarrel with a man who doubted his integrity. "It is your bounden duty, therefore," he urges, "to make amends to him on this subject. But even here I would not counsel *any apology*. I would say that it is your duty as an honest man to say fully, and freely, and unequivocally, that you know Mr. Blackwood to be one, and in all his dealings with you he has behaved as one." Hogg's reply was not satisfactory, and Wilson felt that he could not, under the existing circumstances, be of any use in effecting a reconciliation between the parties, though he expressed a willingness to give his advice in the matter whenever it was desired. Finally, through his exertions and those of other persons who were interested in the matter, a satisfactory arrangement was concluded; and not long afterward Blackwood died. In the course of a few months Hogg followed him to the grave.

Two years after Hogg's death Wilson's heart was saddened by a heavy affliction, which cast a shadow over the whole of his subsequent life. On the 29th of March, 1837, his wife died. Mrs. Wilson, as we have already intimated, was not a person of much intellectual force. But she was sincerely

attached to her husband, and shared to the full his Tory prejudices. "I never look into a newspaper now," she writes in one of her letters after the passage of the Reform Bill; "and my only comfort is in reading the political papers in Blackwood, and remembering that I have lived in the times of the Georges." In the domestic circle she seems to have discharged all her duties with the strictest fidelity; and her death left a void in Wilson's heart and home which even the tender assiduity of his daughters could not fill. When he resumed his college duties six or seven months afterward, it was with the recollection of his loss still fresh in his mind, and it was some time before he was able to speak. Then he simply said, with a tremulous voice, — "Gentlemen, pardon me, but since we last met I have been in the valley of the shadow of death." And the same deep sorrow was on him when he sat down to write. For two or three years after his wife's death he continued to be a regular contributor to the Magazine, and then his contributions almost entirely ceased. During the last thirteen years of his life he wrote but twenty-one or twenty-two articles, or less than one half of the number which he wrote in the last two years before her death. Some new sources of enjoyment, however, were opened to him by the marriage of his two oldest daughters, especially by that of his second daughter, "who, along with her husband, found a home for eleven years in her father's house." Her husband, Mr. J. T. Gordon, now Sheriff of Midlothian, was a Whig, and, as Mrs. Gordon pleasantly remarks, "introduced to his father-in-law's house new visitors and new elements of thought; old prejudices disappeared, and 'Christopher North' was frequently seen in the midst of what once was to his own party the camp of the enemy." Among those with whom Wilson was once more brought into familiar intercourse were Jeffrey and Cockburn.

In the latter part of 1840 he wrote and published his eloquent and exhaustive essay on "The Genius and Character of Burns," certainly one of the best of his critical papers. A few months later he presided at a public dinner given at Edinburgh in honor of Charles Dickens, and pronounced a brilliant and hearty eulogy on the writings of that great novelist,

then in the zenith of his fame. In 1844 he took an active part in the preparations for another celebrated public gathering, the Doon Festival in honor of the memory of Burns, on which occasion he walked seventy miles to be present at the meeting, and made one of his most powerful and effective speeches. Three years afterward, on the formation of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, he was chosen its first President, and made the opening address. Then came an interval of nearly three years, which his daughter describes as a "blank, relieved by no letter, by no work." As early as 1840 he had experienced a slight paralytic attack, which deprived him of the use of his right hand for nearly a year, and seems also to have left the imprint of its withering touch on his mind. Now its effects were again apparent in a listless inactivity, from which he was roused only by the marriage of his eldest son, in June, 1848. In the autumn of that year he paid a visit to his son at Billholm, in the beautiful valley of the Esk. From this visit he returned improved in both bodily and mental health, and with a conviction that he might still be useful.

In 1849 he began a new series of papers in Blackwood's Magazine under the title of "Dies Boreales," which were continued almost to the close of his life; and in the same year his third and youngest daughter was married to Professor Aytoun. Meanwhile he still continued to discharge the duties of his professorship with the same fidelity to his own view of their nature and requirements which he had hitherto exhibited. Occasionally he would wear a more cheerful aspect; and in the company of his grandchildren he took a measured satisfaction. He would frequently accompany them to the Zoölogical Gardens, where his graphic descriptions and animated stories would soon gather many amused listeners round the little party. At other times he would fish with them in imaginary rivers and lakes, unhooking the phantom trout, and cautioning his grandson not to allow his line to be entangled in the trees. In 1848 he made his last visit to Elleray, but the recollections of his early life there were too painful, and he soon returned home. Though his house in Edinburgh was no longer what it had been, it was still the place in which he was most anxious to be.



At length his health began to fail more rapidly, and in the winter of 1850 he was obliged for the first time to suspend his attendance on his classes ; but after a brief respite he resumed the discharge of his duties, and with much exertion he was able to finish his lectures. The summer vacation brought little relief, though he was persuaded to accompany a family party to the Highlands, where he had frequent opportunity to indulge in his favorite amusement of fishing. On his return to Edinburgh he was induced to resign the Professorship which he had held for thirty years ; and shortly after his retirement a pension of three hundred pounds a year was granted to him by the Queen, on the recommendation of Lord John Russell. Toward the close of the year he paid a visit to his brother Robert, at Woodburn, near Dalkeith, and there he remained until the autumn of the following year. While at Woodburn he wrote his last two contributions for Blackwood's Magazine ; and during the same visit he gave a remarkable proof of the change which time had wrought in the strength of his partisan feelings. On occasion of the general election of 1852, though so feeble that he could scarcely walk, he returned to Edinburgh, not to give his support to the Tory candidate, but to vote for the greatest literary ornament of the Whig party since the days of Joseph Addison. As Wilson entered the committee-room to give his vote for Macaulay, shouts of applause showed how such an act was regarded by all who were present ; and every reader of his Life will concur in the judgment thus pronounced on it.

The next two years are almost a blank in his life. His physical condition remained without material change ; but it was evident to all that his mental powers were surely and rapidly failing. A visit from Lockhart served only to show to each of the two friends how complete a wreck the other had become, and could have afforded but little satisfaction to either of them. As the months glided on, Wilson's mind became more and more clouded. He took little interest in passing events, and it was with difficulty that he could rouse himself to any exertion. At length, on the 1st of April, 1854, he was seized by another paralytic attack, and two days afterward he breathed his last, in the midst of his family. He was buried in the Dean Ceme-

tery, in the city where he had so long resided, and his remains were followed to their final resting-place by an immense concourse anxious to do honor to his memory. In the same consecrated ground are laid many of the most illustrious Scotchmen of this century, among whom we need name only four, — Lord Jeffrey, Lord Cockburn, Edward Forbes, and David Scott.

In this rapid sketch of Wilson's life we have not sought to exhibit the origin or to trace the growth of his opinions on any of the literary or political questions which engaged his attention, and we have in general abstained from direct criticism of his writings; but we cannot take leave of our subject without offering some remarks on the special characteristics of his mind, and on the comparative worth of his labors in different departments of literature. By nature he was endowed with a vigorous and healthy organization, which was strengthened by early and constant exercise in the open air; and he not only had a rare power of physical endurance, but could readily sustain a great amount of severe and continuous mental labor. He could walk forty or fifty miles in a day, and could write an article of as many pages, with only the briefest intervals of rest. Great as was Southey's industry, it was inferior to that of Wilson, though the former worked with a more dogged perseverance. When Wilson was engaged in the preparation of an article, he "began to write immediately after breakfast," says Mrs. Gordon, "that meal being despatched with a swiftness commensurate with the necessity of the case before him. He then shut himself into his study, with an express command that no one was to disturb him." If his work was likely to require a day or two, "he never interrupted his pen, saving to take his night's rest, and a late dinner served to him in his study. The hour for that meal was on these occasions nine o'clock; his dinner then consisted invariably of a boiled fowl, potatoes, and a glass of water, — he allowed himself no wine. After dinner he resumed his pen till midnight." With such exertions as these, continued for more than thirty years, we need feel no surprise that his mind finally broke down.

In that mind a certain rough vigor was strangely united with great delicacy of fancy. We see examples of the first

quality in his prose: the second is the distinguishing characteristic of his poetry. His wit was sharp and trenchant, and was used with remorseless severity. His humor was broad, and sometimes even coarse, and was one of the most powerful weapons of attack in his controversial papers, as well as the most striking feature of his more genial productions. He had, moreover, great keenness of intellect, and his mind was stored with vast treasures of information on nearly every subject. His logical powers were not of a high order, and if political considerations had not been permitted to turn the scale, he never could have been a successful competitor with Sir William Hamilton for the chair of Moral Philosophy which had been filled by such men as Dugald Stewart and Dr. Thomas Brown. He seems always to have been a firm and sincere believer in the truths of Christianity, but as he advanced in life his religious convictions deepened and strengthened; and when he wrote his essay on "The Genius and Character of Burns," he made it a point of special interest to inquire whether Burns was a regular church-goer at Dumfries, whether he was on habits of intimacy with any clergyman in the town, whether when he was dying he read the Bible more than formerly, and whether he had regular family worship at Dumfries. In early life he was an uncompromising Tory of the strictest sect, but afterward he became an advocate of free trade, and at a somewhat later period his opinions underwent other changes.

His style was racy and natural, and in general vigorous. He had a great mastery of the Scotch dialect, and his knowledge of it he turned to good use in the "Noctes." There are few things in humorous literature better than the representation of the Shepherd, with his shrewdness, his wit, and his boundless egotism. Wilson's command of the resources of the English language was not perhaps so striking, as the perfect ease with which he expressed himself in this unfamiliar dialect; but his English style was nevertheless admirably adapted to be the vehicle of his thoughts. In dialogue it was fresh, sparkling, and vivacious; in narrative and description it was animated and picturesque; and in his critical papers it was clear and exact, often brilliant, and sometimes impassioned and

eloquent. As a speaker he was not always correct ; but this defect generally passed unnoticed by those who listened with admiration to his glowing sentences, and who were irresistibly borne along with him in the rapid flow of his eloquence. Both in the lecture-room, and when making an after-dinner speech, he gave free play to his imagination ; and his success was uniformly great.

As a writer his reputation has undoubtedly declined since his death. During his life his popularity depended in large measure on the "*Noctes Ambrosianæ*" ; but however attractive these papers were in their original form, it will be generally admitted that they suffered much by being brought together, even after the judicious omissions made by Professor Ferrier. Read at intervals, they had a freshness and vivacity which seemed to afford ample compensation for many obvious defects, but, read consecutively, they weary all except the most devoted admirers of this kind of productions. His poetry was deficient in strength and originality ; and of this defect he seems to have been fully conscious. His two longest poems, and most of his shorter pieces, were written before he was thirty ; and after the publication of the collected edition of his *Poems*, in 1825, he almost entirely ceased to express himself in verse. His prose fictions are often characterized by exquisite tenderness and pathos, but as pictures of Scottish life they have little or no merit. He saw things too much through the medium of his own imagination, and made his characters what he wished them to be, rather than what such persons must have been from the very necessities of the case. As an essayist he has a much higher claim on our regard, and many of his imaginative papers in the "*Recreations*," and in the first two volumes of Professor Ferrier's edition of his "*Essays*," are among his choicest productions. But it is in his critical papers that the real vigor of his mind is most fully exhibited. His keenness of analysis, and his quick perception of every kind of beauty, give to these a value which none of his other writings possess. His papers on "*Homer and his Translators*," in particular, furnish the most convincing evidence of his ripe scholarship and his critical acuteness.